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ABSTRACT

Viewing personality as the ability to elicit consistent reactions from others, individuals classified on Moltola's History of Interpersonal Distance questionnaire were expected to elicit different amounts of nodding and smiling from an interviewer. As predicted, low distance individuals elicited more smiling from one of two interviewers, but no more nodding. (Author)

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Smiling Elicited From an Interviewer as a Function of Subjects' History of Interpersonal Distance[1]

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Carson (1969) has presented an interactional theory in which personality is viewed as the ability to elicit consistent patterns of responses from others. Testing such a theory would appear to require a different kind of research paradigm than is common in traditional personality research. Rather than attempting to measure behavioral or attitudinal regularities within one individual, the researcher would need to collect data regarding the responses an individual elicits from others. Phares (1965), illustrating the latter approach, found that internal subjects, classified according to their scores on Rotter's (1966) Locus of Control Scale, were able to influence the attitudes of fellow college students to a greater extent than were external subjects. In terms of interactional theory, one could assert that it is because internal individuals have a greater impact on others than do externals that they show a stronger belief in internal control.

The present study employed an interactional research

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paradigm to investigate the personality variable, history of interpersonal distance (HID), formulated by Mottola (1968). Using the methodology outlined by Owens (1968), Mottola developed a series of objective life history items which measure the extent to which an individual has experienced close interpersonal relationships with his parents and other important people in his past. Consistent with his theory, Mottola found significant relationships between Ss' scores on the HID questionnaire and such variables as current self-disclosure and affiliation.

In the present study it was predicted that low distance individuals, as determined by Mottola's HID questionnaire, would be more likely than high distance individuals to elicit active involvement from others. Specifically, it was predicted that individuals who had a history of close relationships (low HID) would elicit more nodding and smiling from an interviewer than individuals who had a history of distant relationships (high HID).

Subjects

Subjects (Ss) were 60 female introductory psychology students who had taken the History of Interpersonal Distance (HID) questionnaire during a group testing session, and who scored in the upper, middle or lower 27% intervals on the questionnaire. These Ss represented a portion of a larger sample of Ss who participated in a study of eye-contact patterns. They were selected

for observation in connection with the present study on a non-random basis as scheduling permitted. This selection procedure resulted in an unequal number of Ss in the three HID groups (see Table 1).

Procedure

The Ss of each of the three HID groups were randomly assigned to one of two male interviewers, who were trained to gaze continuously in the direction of the S's eyes during a seven minute interaction. The interviewers' verbal behavior was confined to use of a series of questions and probes about college life designed by Exline, Gray, and Schuette (1965). The interviewers were also instructed to keep their other behavior as "minimal and standard as possible" from one S to the next. The Ss and the interviewers were observed by two raters from behind a one-way mirror. One observer recorded the nodding and smiling of the interviewer, who was led to believe that both observers were recording the eye movements of the S for reliability purposes. The observers and the interviewers were naive regarding the HID scores of the Ss.

Results

The nodding and smiling responses of the interviewers were analyzed separately using two-way analyses of variance of interviewer effects, HID effects, and their interaction. Contrary

to prediction, Ss in different HID groups did not elicit differential amounts of nodding from either interviewer.

The results for smiling can be seen in Table 1. A significant main effect was obtained for interviewers ($F=7.94$, $df=1,56$, $p < .01$), with interviewer 1 smiling more than interviewer 2. The main effect for HID groups, while in the predicted direction, was not statistically significant ($F=2.07$, $df=2,54$, $.10 < p < .20$). However, planned comparisons (Winer, 1962) indicated that Ss in the high HID group elicited significantly fewer smiles from the interviewers than did Ss in the low HID group ($F=4.47$, $df=1,54$, $p < .05$).

There was a significant interaction between the interviewer and HID factors ($F=3.18$, $df=2,54$, $p < .05$). Inspection of Table 1 suggests that interviewer 2 was accounting for virtually all of the over-all differences in smiling among the three HID groups. Planned comparisons of the data for interviewer 2 indicated that the only significant difference in elicited smiles was between the high and the low HID groups ($F=4.35$, $df=1,23$, $p < .05$). As predicted, low distance Ss elicited more smiles, but this was only true for interviewer 2.

Implications and Conclusions

The failure to obtain the predicted effect for nodding is fairly easy to account for on a post hoc basis. Inspection of the

raw data confirmed the observers' impression that nodding may have served a regulatory function during the interview. Most of the interviewers' nods, in contrast to their smiles, came at the end of S remarks and just prior to interviewer questions. By nodding the interviewers appeared to be acknowledging that the S had made her point and signaling that he was about to ask another question.

The fact that the predicted result for smiling was obtained only for interviewer 2 is more difficult to explain. It was the impression of the observers that interviewer 1 was less at ease and more mechanical than interviewer 2. Subject ratings of the interviewers are currently being examined to check out this impression.

The results of the present study lend some support to the utility of an interactive approach to studying personality. It may turn out, however, that the approach is problematical. It is perhaps noteworthy that Phares was not able to replicate his 1965 locus of control study (personal communication). The process by which one individual elicits consistent responses from others may be very complex. For example, in the present study the fact that the interviewer's direction of gaze and verbal behavior was restricted may have been of crucial importance in detecting the predicted effort for smiling.

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Table 1

Mean Number of Smiles Elicited as a Function of Interviewer and HID Group

Interviewer	HID GROUP			
	High	Medium	Low	Total
1	6.125 (8)	8.273 (11)	6.000 (12)	6.839 (31)
2	1.250 (8)	3.769 (13)	6.750 (8)	3.897 (29)
Combined	3.687 (16)	5.833 (24)	6.300 (20)	

Note: The number in parenthesis is the number of Ss per cell.